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ABSTRACT

For South African media and its audiences, as well as news researchers, the democratization developments in South Africa since April 1994 also offer new opportunities in the field of news flow studies. To answer the question "How are South African mass media portraying Africa and the rest of the world in the post-apartheid era through the process of international news coverage?", a study examined two newspapers, "The Star" and "Sunday Times," as well as the South African Broadcasting Corporation's main news broadcast. A content analysis was executed on all international news appearing in the 3 chosen media for the period 3-9 and 17-23 September 1995. The study is part of an international news flow research project, and the project periods were chosen to coincide with those of the international project. Preliminary results showed the following trends: (1) the media covered news topics in line with traditional Western news values--emphasis on sports and entertainment; (2) a majority of news stories were from South Africa, but a significant number of stories were datelined in Western countries; (3) international news sources were overwhelmingly Western; (4) the lack of emphasis on disruptive news from Africa offers a new way to look at the continent; and (5) results suggest that "news mapping" within the South African media could lead to a better understanding of the way international news choices are made, and how people in a changing society get to know the world around them. (NKA)

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Out and into the world: But what kind of world does South African news media present?

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Presented to an Intercultural and Development Communication Division panel discussion: 'Remapping the world of global news flow in the 1990s' at the 46th Conference of the International Communication Association, Chicago, USA, 23-27 May 1996.

ABSTRACT*

Since the 1950s (Hjarvard, 1995), a number of news flow studies have been undertaken internationally (Atwood, 1984; Gerbner & Marvanyi, 1977). The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, as Sreberny-Mohammadi (1995:8) indicates, demand not only new cartographic and conceptual maps, but also new news media maps.

For South African media and its audiences, as well as news researchers, the democratization developments in South Africa since April 1994 also offered new opportunities in the field of news flow studies. Very little research in this field has been done in South Africa, and to the best of the authors' knowledge, no specific South African based research project on news flow at a number of South African media (newspapers and broadcast) was ever presented to a national or international conference or published in research journals.

In terms of international news flow research projects, a relevant question would be: "How are South African mass media portraying Africa and the rest of the world in the post-apartheid era through the process of international news coverage?" This paper deals with some possible answers to this question as it pertains to two specific newspapers, namely *The Star* and *Sunday Times*, as well as the main news broadcast at 20:00 from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

As part of an international research project* content analysis (according to a research framework supplied to all participants in the international project and according to tradi-

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tional research methods, e.g. Holsti, 1969; Stempel & Westley, 1981) was executed on all international news appearing in the three media mentioned above for the period 3-9 and 17-23 September 1995. The project periods were chosen to coincide with that of the international project. A final group of international news reports was demarcated as international news and selected for this project (N=820). Our general goal was to determine answers to some of the questions set in the international project:

1 What were the main topics covered in the South African media?

Sports (26.5%) and entertainment (11.6%) were the two most single covered international news topics. Then followed: international economics (8.3%); crime (8.2%); oddities (6%); international politics (5.1%); domestic politics (4.1%); domestic economics (4%); international military (3.9%); culture (3.7%); 'other topics' (where a topic was covered 3% or less of the total number of stories): 18.6%.

2 What were the main topics according to regions?

Topics mostly covered from the West were sports and entertainment (Western Europe [N=172]: sports: 30% and entertainment: 13%; North America [N=131]: entertainment: 34% and sports: 21%). News from Eastern/Central Europe (N=47) consisted for almost 50% of international military (38%) and civil war (11%) topics. In the Middle East (N=21) two topics (international military: 24%; crime: 29%) were covered in more than 50% of the cases. In South America (N=10) natural disasters were covered in 50% of the stories. The Asia/Pacific region (N=96), though consisting of only 11% of the total number of stories, covered a somewhat different range of topics (culture: 17%; sports: 17%; human rights: 12%; social services: 10%).

In Africa (N=317) the emphasis was on sports (34%); international economics (11%); crime (9%) and international politics (8%). The high percentage stories from Africa dealing with sports (34%) cannot be judged as a general indication, as the project period overlapped with the African Games held in Zimbabwe.

3 What were the main/specific events covered?

In the research period little coverage was given (outside Africa) to specific 'big news' events. About 6,1% (50 stories) of the total number of stories (N=820) was devoted to 'big news events'. Of these stories (N=50): 43% were devoted to the Women's Conference in Beijing; 28% to UN/NATO bombing in Eastern/Central Europe; French nuclear tests (25%) and bombings in Srinigar, India (2%) and Lyons, France (2%).

4 What flow patterns could be distinguished in terms of datelines?

According to regions a total of 40% of the stories was datelined in Africa (South Africa: 30,6%; Zimbabwe 2,9%), followed by Western Europe 21% (UK: 14,2%); North America

14% (USA: 12,9%); Asia/Pacific 11% (China: 2,7%); Central/Eastern Europe 5%; Middle East 1%; other regions 8%.

5 How were the regions covered?

This section showed the same pattern as the previous one with most of the main news stories (N=820) covering Africa 37% (South Africa: 27%; Zimbabwe 1,3%; rest of Africa: 8,7%); followed by Western Europe 21% (UK: 12,9%; France 3,3%); North America 17% (USA: 14,9%); Asia/Pacific 12%; Central Europe 6% (Bosnia 2,3%); Middle East 3%; South America 1% and other 3%.

6 What were the main sources of international news?

The main sources for international news (N=820) were: own correspondents and other editorial sources (39%); AFP and AP through Sapa (16%); AFP (3%) and Reuters (9%) independently; none indicated (19%) and other (14%). The relative high incidence of the latter two was mainly caused by news media not stating the exact source of the particular news stories.

7 What was the nature of focus ..

Just over half of the stories (52%) were classified as minor; 34% medium and 14% of major size. The majority of the stories (60%) dealt with topics other than the South African ('own country') situation. More than 90% of the stories consisted of news with very little editorials, letters, pictures or cartoons.

8 Who were the main 'gender actors'?

From what we could ascertain from the stories, 44% of the 'gender actors' were male and 9% female with 47% uncertain or not stated. Of the correspondents 68% were male, 24% female and 8% uncertain/not stated. In all regions, there were more male correspondents (50% and more), except in Asia where there were 80% female *vis-à-vis* 20% male correspondents.

9 How was the UN Women's Conference in Beijing covered?

Though the Conference was identified as one of the specific stories covered during the research project (see question 3), only 2.7% (22 stories) of the total number of international stories (N=820) dealt with the Conference.

10 How were disruptive and non-disruptive events covered?

According to our analysis, the majority of news reports (N=820) from three regions could be defined as news about disruptive events: South America (55,5%); Central/East Europe (54,1%) and the Middle East (52,4%). The majority of stories from North America

(87,4%); Western Europe (78,6%); and Asia (61%) could not be classified as news about disruptive events, but were classified as none/non-disruptive. According to the same analysis, only 16.7% of news about Africa was of a disruptive nature, while 83,1% could be classified as none/non-disruptive.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The preliminary results showed *inter alia* the following trends:

- The media covered news topics very much in line with traditional Western news values, with emphasis placed on sports and entertainment (38.1%; N=820).

- A significant number of news stories were still datelined in Western countries (Western Europe/North America: 35%), but the majority of datelines (40%) were from South Africa/Africa (South Africa: 30,6% and rest of Africa: 9.4%).

- The international news sources were overwhelmingly from Western origin (AP, AFP, Reuters and AP/AFP through Sapa).

- While news coverage of regions such as South America and the Middle East tend to confirm the traditional 'bad news hypothesis', the lack of emphasis on disruptive news from Africa (16.7%) offers a new way to look at news from this continent.

- As a first effort as far as the researchers know, this was an attempt to ascertain the news flow to two important main-stream South African newspapers and the main TV news broadcast as it relates to foreign news and the consequent setting of the news agenda in post-apartheid South Africa.

- The research results suggest that 'news mapping' within the South African media could lead to a better understanding of the way international news choices are made, but also of the way people in a changing society such as South Africa get to know the world around them.

* FOOTNOTE

This panel presentation forms part of an international news flow research project initiated at a meeting in Tampere, Finland in 1994 with Kaarle Nordenstreng as chairperson. The project, with Robert L Stevenson and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi as international project leaders, was undertaken during 1995 in some 40 countries, and consisted of qualitative and quantitative analysis. This presentation reports on the South African part of the quantitative research undertaken in the different countries on 3-9; 17-23 September 1995. The authors wish to thank Elanie Steyn, Louisa van Wyk and Sarenda Eloff for their valuable help in coding a number of news reports and the Faculty of Arts Research Committee at Potchefstroom University for financial assistance. The full paper will be made available on e-mail.